



Hawaii State Department of Health

Disease Investigation Branch

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Pneumococcal Disease

What is pneumococcal disease?

Pneumococcal diseases are infections caused by the bacteria *Streptococcus pneumoniae* also known as pneumococcus. The most common types of infections caused by these bacteria are ear infections, pneumonia, bloodstream infections and meningitis (infections of the lining of the brain and spinal cord).

How is it spread?

These bacteria are spread from person to person by coughing or sneezing. It is common for people, especially children, to carry the bacteria in their noses or throats without becoming ill from it.

Young children are much more likely than older children and adults to get pneumococcal disease, and it can be a very serious illness in children under two years of age, who may need to be hospitalized. Recurrent ear infections can cause permanent hearing loss.

What are the symptoms?

Otitis media (ear infections) cause pain in the ear. Other symptoms may include sleeplessness, fever and irritability.

In adults, symptoms of pneumonia include sudden fever, chills, difficulty breathing and chest pain, and a wet cough. Infants and small children may have these symptoms as well as fever, cough, rapid breathing, or grunting.

Symptoms of meningitis include high fever, headache, and stiff neck. Other symptoms may include nausea, vomiting, confusion and sleepiness. In infants, the classic symptoms of headache and neck stiffness may be hard to see. Babies with meningitis may be inactive or irritable, and they may vomit, or not want to eat.

How is it treated?

Pneumococcal disease can be treated with medicines prescribed by a doctor. Those with serious illness need to be treated in the hospital.

Can it be prevented?

There are two vaccines for pneumococcal disease. The pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV) is recommended for infants less than 2 years old, and is given at 2, 4, 6 and 12-15 months.

The second vaccine is called the pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine (PPV) and is recommended for adults 65 years of age and older, anyone over 2 years of age with certain chronic illnesses or immune system problems and certain Native American populations.

Ask your doctor or the Department of Health for more information about these vaccines.

For more information, see the CDC's website at <http://www.cdc.gov/nip/diseases/Pneumo/>